Guiding Question: How Do Special Education Teachers and Related Services Specialists collaborate with each other, and with their school teams, to implement the five district goals and the 21st Century Model of Education using the PLC model?

I struggle with all the strands of this challenge, both vertically and horizontally and given the number and variety of these educators across preK-12 for our students with disabilities.

“Special Education PLC” work can be about so many elements, with lots of “Givens” to contend with.

* Given that you are responsible for understanding, teaching, and supporting what each student needs to know and be able to do at more than one grade level, sometimes as many as 6 grade levels.
* Given that to meet requirements of IEPs you also need to define what each individual student needs to know and be able to do, and to meet that individual need.
* Given that you also must define and provide accommodations and modifications for helping students reach a range of grade level standards.
* Given that you must understand how the disability may affect the student’s ability to know and be able to do what is expected at each grade level.
* Given that collaborating with regular educators is the key to improving student achievement for students with disabilities.
* Given that coordinating and leading PLC work amongst special educators requires thoughtful planning and time, and that there are other PLC groups with whom the special educator needs to be involved with.

So where to start?

ACTION PLAN:

1. Modify and format all professional development so that it focuses on student achievement and outcomes, make sure all learning addresses and answers the “Why?” question.
2. Help special educators see that even IEPs can be reframed around the essential questions of a PLC: “What does this particular student, given this particular set of challenges, need to know and be able to do?” “Why are we writing this goal? Will it lead to student learning?”
3. Give principals ideas/focus questions that meaningfully draw special educators into existing building and grade level PLCs to maximize collaboration and student achievement.
4. Begin by building essential understandings of PLC work into existing framework of meetings with specialists, early release trainings, etc. as we go about building skills and knowledge essential to the unique role of special educators.
5. Continue to investigate alternative ways of collaborating out of buildings with other teachers who share your work, such as Skype, shared folders, wiki and livebinder, etc.
6. Organize special education teachers regionally to make face to face PLCs more workable within tight time frames.
7. Seek permission to use professional development time more flexibly so that quality time is available for deeper PLC work among special educators.